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MILITARY HISTORY SECTIONThe Preparation and Use of Strategic Reserves
in the Second World War

by

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The experience of all warfare, and in particular the direct experience of the Russian army in the First World War and of the Soviet Army in the civil war in the USSR, has convincingly demonstrated the significance of reserves. For this reason, in the period preceding the Second World War, Soviet military-theoretical thought devoted much attention to working out the problem of the creation and use of strategic reserves.

According to the views existing before the war, the High Command Reserves (RGK - Rezerv Glavnogo Komandovaniya) consisted of: that part of the nation's armed forces directly under the orders of the High Command, and specialized units (artillery, tank, chemical, engineer, etc.) not an organic part of combined-arms large units, but intended for the reinforcement of the latter depending on the operational and tactical missions being fulfilled by them.

In the pre-war years a great deal of work was done in our country on the creation of strategic reserves. This was reflected in the practical measures adopted by the Soviet command on the eve of the war. The existing estimates for strategic deployment of our armed forces called for the creation of five armies in the High Command Reserve - the 16th, 19th, 22nd, 24th, and 28th. The 16th and 19th Armies were destined for the southwestern axis and the 22nd for the western, and the 24th and 28th were to constitute the central reserve of the High Command, located northwest and southwest of Moscow. Just before the war the 21st Army was formed, and at the very beginning of the war - the 20th Army, which were also included in the High Command Reserve. Thus, at the very beginning of the war there were eight armies under the direct orders of the High Command, consisting



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of 77 divisions (58 rifle, 13 tank, and 6 motorized). To be sure, the combat effectiveness of these troops was rather low - the rifle divisions were at their cut-back peacetime strength, while most of the tank and motorized divisions of the mechanized corps had still not completed their formation, had few tanks and little artillery, and were weakly knit.

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One very important circumstance should be emphasized. Just before the beginning of the war, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) reached the decision to unite the armies of the High Command Reserve under a single command. On 25 June this decision was put into a directive of the People's Commissariat of Defense, creating a group of armies under the command of Marshal of the Soviet Union S. M. Budennyi. Thus, at the very start of the war a powerful formation of strategic reserves had already been created, which was not organically committed to a front.

In comparison we should point out that the reserve of the German-Fascist command had only 24 divisions, of which 12 were designated for army groups "North", "Center", and "South".

Our situation with regard to the specially formed units (formirovaniye) of the RGK on the eve of the war was considerably worse. The artillery of the High Command Reserve was very small in number, even though the experience of the First World War had shown that the RGK must have strong artillery. At the start of the Second World War we had in the RGK 14 gun regiments, 60 howitzer regiments, 15 separate battalions, and 2 separate batteries. They numbered 4326 artillery pieces, or about 5 percent of the over-all number of such weapons in the Soviet Army. Howitzer systems predominated in the artillery of the RGK and were intended for ensuring the breach of the enemy's defense, but gun artillery was in short supply and antiaircraft artillery was completely lacking. As for the antitank artillery of the RGK, it was only just before the war (in May 1941) that the formation was begun of ten antitank brigades (with two regiments in each). The engineer units of the RGK consisted of 18 engineer regiments,

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16 pontoon-bridging regiments, 3 separate battalions, and one company. These units were far below strength and were very poorly supplied with engineer equipment. Tank and aviation units and large units were completely absent from the High Command Reserve.

In contrast to the combined-arms formations, which were under the direct orders of the High Command, the specially formed units of the RGK were transferred as reinforcement for the troops in the military districts. The distribution of the existing artillery and engineer units of the RGK at the beginning of the war represented, on the whole, a situation in which the overwhelming mass of them were in the Baltic, Western, and Kiev Border Districts.

Once the war began, it introduced great changes both in the preparation of the strategic reserves and in the preliminary plans for their use. These can be seen in the following:

- the troops of the border districts were unable to perform the task assigned to them - to repel the enemy attack, to halt his advance, and to create the conditions for our armed forces to go over to the offensive. For this reason it was necessary to use the existing strategic reserves, not for a joint offensive with the troops of the western border districts, as had been planned, but for defense;
- in the first days of the war it became clear that the enemy had concentrated his main efforts on the western axis, where a very difficult situation was created for our troops. All the strategic reserves were therefore redirected onto this axis. This required, specifically, the rapid transfer to the western axis of the 16th and 19th Armies, which had earlier been moved into the Ukraine;
- by the end of June 1941 it was already clear that the Western Front was in no condition to perform its tasks with the forces which it had left. Therefore, the 16th, 19th, 20th, 21st, and 22nd Armies

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--at the very beginning of the war the serious shortage of artillery and engineer units under the RGK began to be felt, and the lack of tank and aircraft reserves of General Headquarters (Stavka) greatly complicated the conduct of armed combat.

The Soviet command was presented with an exceptionally complex task - the rapid preparation of strategic reserves, but such methods of creating them as drawing them from the formations and large units of the army in the field, or transferring a large number of troops from the Far Eastern, Central Asian, or Transcaucasus Military Districts were practically out of the question.

Under these conditions the only solution was to create strategic reserves out of newly formed units, but this involved great difficulties. The fact was that the buildup of our armed forces in accordance with the mobilization plans which existed on the eve of the war had already been completed. Further buildup had not been foreseen by any pre-war plans, and consequently a reserve of officer personnel and stockpiles of arms and combat equipment for these purposes had not been created. In addition, the enemy's seizure of important industrial areas and the necessity to evacuate industry to the east considerably reduced our capabilities for producing combat equipment and arms.

The solution of so vast and incredibly difficult a task was within the power only of the Soviet State and our people, as led by the experienced Communist Party.

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First of all, the large-scale buildup of rifle troops was begun. On 29 June 1941 the decision had already been taken for the supplementary formation of 15 rifle divisions; on 8 July there followed a decision to form 56 rifle divisions and 25 divisions of people's militia (narodnoye opolcheniye) and on 19 August, still another 85 rifle divisions. The formation also began of a large number of cavalry large units (from July to November 1941, 64 cavalry divisions were formed). The establishment of new army commands took place simultaneously. From 1 July to 5 December 1941, 25 commands of combined-arms armies were newly created in the General Headquarters reserve and 16 armies directly within fronts. To be sure, in this same period, however, 15 army commands were disbanded.

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In connection with the growing need for command personnel, urgent measures were adopted for their training: the system of training institutions and courses was broadened and the number of those in training was increased. But these could produce results only in the future. Meanwhile, for the immediate satisfaction of the need for command personnel it was decided to disband the rifle corps commands. To fulfil the need for combat equipment and arms, literally all possibilities were used, including the issuance to the troops of obsolete models.

Quite naturally, the buildup of a large number of formations and large units in a short period could not help but reflect on their quality. Many large units were dispatched to the front inadequately organized and armed. Because of the need for the rapid commitment of large units to the army in the field, a considerable number of rifle and ski brigades were created.

The war demonstrated that infantry on the defensive, and even more on the offensive, was in need of tanks designated for its direct support (NPP). But, there were no such tanks, either within the rifle large units or in the separate tank units of the RGK. In connection with this, the formation was begun of separate tank brigades and battalions of the RGK. As for the mechanized corps, they were liquidated in July

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and August 1941. On the base of the 26th and 27th Mechanized Corps, ten tank divisions were formed in the Moscow Military District, but they did not last long, because it proved impossible to supply them with tanks.

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The experience of even the first weeks of the war revealed a real need for a sharp increase in the artillery of the RGK. The difficulty of resolving this problem was aggravated by the fact that the shortage of the materiel portion and of command personnel was keenly felt. For this reason, all the corps regiments were transferred to the artillery of the RGK, as well as the second artillery regiments from each of the regular army (kadrovyy) rifle divisions, and also the eleven chemical mortar battalions which had existed before the war. Because of the unwieldiness and the difficulty of controlling the RGK regiments which had been in existence before the war, their authorized personnel strength was considerably reduced. The antitank brigades were also disbanded, but their component regiments were detached and became independent. There also took place a supplemental formation of RGK artillery, particularly antitank. Suffice it to say that in 1941, 72 antitank regiments, 41 artillery, and 2 mortar regiments, and 74 battalions and 5 regiments of rocket artillery were formed. However, the number of weapons in the RGK artillery not only did not increase, but, as a consequence of losses sustained, it even decreased in comparison with the beginning of the war, and at the end of 1941 it consisted of 4180 pieces.

In the very first months of the war the need arose for aircraft reserves of General Headquarters. In August 1941 began the creation of reserve aviation groups intended as reinforcement for the air forces of the fronts.

The need for engineer troops in the RGK gave rise to the necessity for forming a large number of engineer units. By 1 August 1941, 84 engineer battalions, 25 engineer-construction battalions, 43 pontoon battalions, 34 light river-crossing units (park), 18 electrotechnical companies, 18 camouflage companies, 19 hydrotechnical companies, and other units had been newly established. In October 1941, 10 combat engineer

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armies were formed for the construction of rear defense lines.

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In the heated engagements that developed in the summer and fall of 1941, the enemy achieved outstanding successes. But he failed to attain his basic political and strategic goals. In these battles the German-Fascist army was exhausted and bled white; the enemy was checked.

The strategic reserves played an enormous role in the performance of this very important task. During the summer-fall campaign of 1941 a total of 21 combined-arms armies, about 290 divisions, and up to 90 brigades were committed to the army in the field from the General Headquarters reserve. The strategic reserves were used for various purposes, depending on the actually developing situation: for the restoration of a disrupted strategic front (the 16th, 19th, 20th, 21st, and 22nd Armies in July 1941 on the line of the Western Dvina and Dnepr Rivers and the 5th Army in October 1941 on the Mozhaysk defense line), for the creation of a strategic depth of defense on the main axis (the 24th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 43rd, and 49th Armies from July to September 1941¹), for the delivery of powerful counterstrikes against the most dangerous enemy groupings (the 34th Army in the area of Staraya Russa, the 50th Army on the Starodub axis, and the 1st Assault Army, and the 20th Army in the area of Yakhroma), and also as screening forces for important objectives of strategic significance (the Maritime ~~W~~/Primorskaya/ Army in Odessa, the 51st Army in the Crimea, the 4th Army in the vicinity of Tikhvin, and the 56th Army in Rostov). To perform important operational-strategic tasks, use was also made of armies formed directly within the fronts.


1. On 14 July 1941, the 24th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, and 32nd Armies were combined into the Front of Reserve Armies. On 30 July this front was disbanded, and the 24th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 43rd Armies were incorporated into the newly formed Reserve Front.

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The experience of the summer-fall campaign of 1941 clearly demonstrated that the Soviet command, in an extraordinarily complex and difficult situation, was capable of employing strategic reserves not only on a mass scale, but also purposefully. The great bulk of them were committed to the operation as entire formations (armies and even fronts), and chiefly on the main axis, which at that time was the western. Suffice it to say that of the 21 armies drawn from the General Headquarters reserve, 15 were used on the western axis. The same thing also applied to the disposition of the specially formed units of the RGK. Thus, of the 92 artillery regiments of the RGK, 69 were transferred to fronts on the western axis, 3 to the northwestern, 15 to the southwestern and 5 to separate armies. The overwhelming majority of the RGK tank and engineer units were also transferred to fronts on the western axis.

By the end of the summer-fall campaign of 1941, the German-Fascist command had completely expended all the reserves allotted to the Soviet-German front. At the same time the Soviet Supreme High Command had at its disposal sufficiently large reserves - the 10th, 26th, 28th, 39th, 57th, 58th, 59th, 60th, and 61st Armies.

The great work which had been performed in our country on the formation of strategic reserves produced brilliant results. At the moment that the German-Fascist army, despite its serious defeat before Rostov and the powerful blows of our troops before Tikhvin, was still making desperate efforts to seize Moscow, General Headquarters of the Supreme High Command (Stavka Verkhovnogo Glavnokomandovaniya) moved up its reserves. They were used originally to reinforce the troops of the Western Front and to put a final halt to the enemy offensive. Later, these reserves participated in the counteroffensive. In the period from 20 November to 20 December 1941, 26 divisions and 34 brigades were committed to battle and played an important role in defeating the enemy before Moscow. At the end of November and during December 1941, as in the preceding months, the great bulk of the reserves were concentrated on the main (western) axis.

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Committed here were the 10th, 39th, and 61st Armies and also part of the troops from the 28th and 60th Armies.

The successful counteroffensives by Soviet troops before Moscow, Rostov, and Tikhvin convinced the Soviet command of the possibility of developing a broad general offensive with decisive aims on all the main axes of the Soviet-German front. Without going into a detailed analysis of this decision, one can only note that, as was shown by the subsequent course of events, it was not adequately grounded. The conversion of this decision into reality required an appropriate distribution of strategic reserves. Beginning in January 1942, the General Headquarters reserve was moved to the northwestern axis (the 3rd¹ and 2nd² Assault Armies and the 59th Army), and to the southwestern axis (the 47th and 57th Armies). During this period, not even one army was given to the western axis. Furthermore, on 19 January 1942 the 1st Assault Army was taken from the Western Front and regrouped on the Northwestern Front.

The offensive by Soviet troops from January to March 1942 did not produce decisive success on even one of the axes. The inconclusiveness of the 1942 winter operations was the result of many reasons, which have been thoroughly elucidated in our literature. One of these reasons was the scattering of the General Headquarters reserves. If they had been more purposefully employed on the main axis, the task of completing the defeat of Army Group "Center" would have been achieved, and this would have had great significance for the further course of the battle along the entire Soviet-German front.

In March 1942, for the first time after many months of heated engagements, there appeared signs of a strategic pause. In individual areas heavy combat still continued,

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but broad combat operations, in effect, came to a halt. Both sides, in different ways but with great energy, started preparations for summer operations.

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The German-Fascist command, making use of the absence of a second front, in rapid order mustered divisions from all over Western Europe and transferred them to the Soviet-German front. They made harsh demands on their satellites, obliging them to allot as many troops as possible for the war against the USSR. As a result of these measures, the strength of enemy troops on our front in the period from March to June 1942 increased by 20 divisions. In addition, from July to October 1942 inclusive, another 30 divisions and 5 brigades were added.

The enormous task of deploying and amassing strategic reserves took place in our country under the direct leadership of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government. In this period, for the first time during the Second World War, the creation of strategic reserves began to occur at the expense of withdrawing troops from the army in the field, but the number of troops withdrawn was still insignificant. From March to the beginning of July 1941 it consisted of only 10 rifle divisions in all. For this reason, both in the period of preparation for the summer-fall campaign of 1942 as well as during it, strategic reserves were being created from newly formed units. But with this, essentially new phenomena began to appear. Thus, in the first half of 1942, 9 guards rifle corps were formed. Each of these was composed of 1 division, 4 rifle brigades, and 1 tank brigade, an artillery regiment, and a guards mortar battalion. From April to June 1942 the formation was begun of major tank formations and large units. In the first days of June began the creation of 2 tank armies (the 3rd and the 5th). By May 1942, 11 tank corps had been formed, and during May and June the formation of another 14 was begun. The creation of tank brigades and battalions continued at the same time.

In the RGK artillery took place the formation of new artillery and mortar regiments. Suffice it to say that from

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January to May 1942 alone, 75 antitank, 110 gun or howitzer, and 63 mortar, regiments were created. In July 1942 the RGK antitank regiments were reformed into tank-destroyer regiments (istrebitelno-protivotankovyy polk). In June 1942, the formation began of units of heavy rocket artillery. Specifically, the first 20 M-30 separate guards mortar battalions were organized between 9 June and 10 July.

Among the engineer troops began the creation in May 1942 of 8 engineer brigades, separate pools of engineer vehicles and also other units. As for the combat engineer armies, at the beginning of 1942 they were disbanded and used for the formation of rifle and engineer units and large units.

Especially important was the formation, which had begun, of large-scale air reserves for General Headquarters. In place of the reserve air groups, 3 aviation armies were organized (2 fighter and 1 bomber), but it was later recognized to be more advisable to have air corps in the General Headquarters reserve. In the summer and fall of 1942, 9 such corps were formed.

Thus, by the summer of 1942 the changes in the qualitative make-up of the strategic reserves had already been decided. They had come to include not only combined-arms formations and large units and artillery and tank units, but also major formations and large units of armored troops and aviation.

In the summer of 1942 the Soviet Supreme High Command was planning to conduct offensive operations on all the main axes of the Soviet-German front. A considerable part of the strategic reserves which had been amassed was transferred to the fronts. Thus, during April 1942, the fronts received 29 rifle divisions, 10 rifle brigades, 11 tank corps, and 24 tank brigades from the General Headquarters reserve. The distribution of the strategic reserves on all the axes of the Soviet-German front was relatively even. In the General Headquarters reserve, at the beginning of May, there remained comparatively small forces - 3 combined-arms armies and

2 tank armies. The greater part of the General Headquarters reserves was in the process of formation. At the end of May, in connection with the sharply worsening situation, the rapid formation was begun of 10 reserve combined-arms armies.

The combat operations on the Soviet-German front which were developing in May and June 1942 in the Crimea, and before Kharkov and Lyuban, ended unsuccessfully for our troops. One of the major reasons for this was the scattering of the strategic reserves without a sufficiently decisive concentration of them on only one axis considered by the Supreme High Command to be the main one.

The unsuccessful outcome of the combat operations of May and June 1942 and the shift of our troops to the strategic defense once again demanded a radical re-examination of the timing and the purposes for committing strategic reserves to battle. Instead of being used to develop an offensive, they were being used for defensive operations. In addition to this, the serious situation which had taken shape compelled the committing to battle of the majority of the newly formed units (combined-arms reserve armies and tank corps) before they were adequately knit together and trained.

The main events of the summer-fall campaign of 1942 developed on the southwestern axis, where the main mass of the General Headquarters reserves was also being used. Eight of the 10 newly formed reserve armies, almost all the tank corps, the main mass of the tank brigades, and the artillery regiments were moved here. Six combined-arms armies and two tank armies, which had been newly formed in June to October 1942, were also used on this axis. In the period from May to October 1942, a total of about 160 divisions, about 70 rifle brigades, and 14 tank and 5 mechanized corps were committed to battle from the General Headquarters reserve. Of these, more than 100 rifle divisions, more than 30 rifle brigades, 12 tank and 5 mechanized, corps were on the southwestern axis.

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The strategic reserves were committed to battle for various purposes: for the formation of a new front in depth (the 6th and 60th Armies before Voronezh, the 62nd, 63rd, and 64th Armies on the Stalingrad axis), for the reinforcement of the fronts in the field (the 44th Army in the Northern Caucasus), and for delivering strong counter-strikes against the enemy (the 5th Tank Army northeast of Voronezh, the 1st and 4th Tank Armies in the area of Kalach, and the 24th, 66th, and 1st Guards Armies north of Stalingrad). Thus, the purposeful and massed use of strategic reserves was already very typical of the defensive period of this campaign. The great bulk of the reserves were committed in the form of formations (obyedineniye). Specifically, two new fronts were created from the General Headquarters reserves, the Voronezh and the Stalingrad. But a considerable number of divisions, brigades, and artillery regiments were committed piecemeal, which was caused by the intensity of combat created in the Stalingrad area.

In the difficult engagements of the summer and fall of 1942, the enemy succeeded in seizing important areas of our country and in breaking through to the Volga near Stalingrad and to the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains. But even this time he was not able to attain his basic goals. Soviet troops wore out and bled white the strike groupings of the German-Fascist army. In October, the German-Fascist command was compelled to issue an order for a shift to strategic defense along the whole front, and only immediately within Stalingrad and before Moscow did it attempt to continue offensive operations. The purposeful and massed use of the strategic reserves of General Headquarters played an important role in performing the task of exhausting and draining the lifeblood of the enemy.

Although the heavy battles in the area of Stalingrad and Mozdok continued during October and at the beginning of November 1942, they were still not determining the strategic decisions of the Soviet Supreme High Command with regard to the preparation and use of its reserves. The main attention

at this time was directed toward preparations for shifting to offensive operations, and above all to the organization of a counteroffensive in the area of Stalingrad. On this axis, work was also being done on the preparation and concentration of the strategic reserves.

In the fall of 1942, on a larger scale than earlier, General Headquarters was creating its reserves by withdrawing combined-arms large units from the fronts in the field. To be sure, only individual large units were withdrawn, and after being built up to strength they were sent to the necessary area and incorporated into the fronts operating there. Along with this, a considerable part of the strategic reserves even at that period consisted of the troops of newly formed units.

As for the newly formed units, there was here an even clearer shift to armored and mechanized troops. The setting up of rifle large units had almost ceased (in October and November 1942 only 10 rifle divisions and 7 brigades were formed), but, on the other hand, by December 1942 we already had 20 tank corps and 7 mechanized corps. The creation of such a number of armored and mechanized large units was connected with the preparations for broad offensive operations. The successful carrying out of these measures was naturally aided by the growing capacity of our industry to produce combat equipment and arms.

In the organization of the newly formed specialized units of the RGK, one could also observe very distinctive changes which had been caused by the preparations for the impending offensive operations. From October 1942 the formation began of artillery divisions in the RGK artillery (up to the end of the year, 26 such divisions had been formed), and in November antiaircraft divisions started to be formed (up to the end of 1942, 46 divisions had been formed). The formation was continued of units of rocket artillery, and by November 1942 there were 106 separate battalions of rocket artillery (69 of them heavy) and 85 regiments (4 of them heavy). In November and December 1942, on the base of the

existing battalions and regiments of heavy rocket artillery, heavy guards mortar brigades were created, and at the end of December, by order of General Headquarters - 4 guards heavy mortar divisions. In the tank troops, together with the tank and mechanized corps, the formation continued, although, to be sure, on a considerably smaller scale than formerly, of tank brigades and battalions; 19 separate heavy tank regiments were newly organized, and in December the formation was begun of assault gun regiments. In the engineer troops of the RGK, 15 combat engineer brigades, 2 pontoon-bridging brigades, and 1 heavy pontoon regiment were created in October 1942. The formation of the RGK air corps also continued. By November 1942, there were already 13 fighter, attack, bomber, and mixed, corps of the RGK.

In preparing for decisive offensive operations, the Supreme High Command, in the period between October and 20 November 1942, dispatched to the army in the field, 27 rifle divisions, 18 rifle brigades, 2 tank corps, and 5 mechanized corps. These forces were used only in part for defensive operations, and were mainly designated for future offensive operations.

Along with this, by 20 November 1942 there remained in the General Headquarters reserve quite large forces: the 1st and 2nd Guards Armies, the 2nd, 3rd, and 10th Reserve Armies, and the 3rd Tank Army.

The winter campaign of 1942/43 began with the counter-offensive by the Soviet troops before Stalingrad, which ended with the encirclement and destruction of a very large enemy grouping. Supreme in its scale and intensity, the battle before Stalingrad ended in victory for the Soviet Armed Forces. It determined the beginning of a radical turning point in the Second World War, and it ensured the development of a broad offensive of Soviet troops which continued until March 1943.

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The preparations for and the course of the winter campaign of 1942/43 were marked by an exceptionally purposeful employment of the strategic reserves. Both in the process of preparation and during the campaign, no less than 70 percent of all the reserves allotted to the army in the field were committed on the main (the southwestern) axis.

The strategic reserves were used to strengthen the fronts during the preparation for and during the offensive operations, to repel the enemy's counterstrikes (the 2nd Guards Army before Stalingrad), to repel the enemy's counteroffensive before Kharkov (the 21st and 64th Armies), and also to create a strike grouping for a newly opened strategic axis (the Central Front). Very typical of this campaign was the creation of a new front for the counteroffensive (the Southwestern Front¹) and also the regrouping of the entire front from the Stalingrad area onto the Orel axis (the Central Front). In this campaign the reserves were committed to the main axis chiefly as whole armies, or even fronts. The overwhelming bulk of the air, artillery, tank, and engineer large units of the RGK were also used on the main (the southwestern) axis.

The shattering defeat of the German-Fascist troops in the winter campaign of 1942/43 shook the war machine of Fascist Germany to its foundations and brought on a sharp deterioration of its external and internal political position. Discord appeared in the coalition of the Fascist aggressors. In an attempt to raise its shaken prestige, the Hitlerite leadership decided in the summer of 1943 to undertake active offensive operations with decisive goals and to concentrate the main forces for the first stage of the operation in the area of the Kursk salient, in order to destroy the Soviet troops in it.

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1. The Southwestern Front was formed on 31 October 1942. It included the 63rd and 21st Combined-Arms Armies, the 5th Tank Army and the 17th ... a few words missing.

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The Soviet Armed Forces, firmly holding the strategic initiative in their hands, also got ready for active operations with decisive goals. However, considering the actual situation and the proposals of the fronts, General Headquarters decided to wear down the enemy's strike groupings in defensive engagements in the Kursk salient, and then to complete his defeat by a powerful blow, and, once having launched a general offensive, to fulfil the tasks set forth for the summer of 1943. The course of events demonstrated the correctness and the advisability of this decision.

Beginning in April 1943, both sides developed their preparations for summer operations. The German-Fascist command, in accordance with Hitler's order of 22 March 1943, brought up to full prescribed strength all infantry, tank, and motorized divisions, especially those which were to attack on the Kursk axis. Formed at the same time and transferred to the Soviet-German front were a large number of heavy tank battalions (batalon) armed with "Tiger" tanks, and of battalions (divizion) of "Ferdinand" assault guns. The enemy did not succeed, however, in creating large-scale reserves. The high command of the German ground troops had in all 6 divisions and 4 brigades in reserve. To be sure, there were 18 divisions in the reserve of the army groups.

The Soviet Supreme High Command resolved the problem in a completely different way. Together with heavy reinforcement of the fronts in the field, it set up powerful reserves under its own orders. The strategic reserves were now being created almost exclusively by the withdrawal of troops (whole armies as a rule) from the complement of the fronts in the field. Thus, in April and May 1943 the 11th, 27th, 47th, 52nd, 53rd, and 68th Armies, and somewhat earlier the 4th and 5th Guards Armies, were assigned to the General Headquarters reserve. It is particularly important that all these troops had already had combat experience.

As for the formation of new large units, it proceeded mainly by the creation of tank and mechanized corps, and also of tank armies. It is especially important to note a basic feature of the formation of tank armies: although

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in 1942 they had a mixed composition, i.e., included rifle divisions along with tank corps, in 1943 tank armies were created which consisted of 2 tank and 1 mechanized corps, and also of artillery, engineer, and other units. These armies were more mobile and more powerful. In January and February 1943, the 1st, 2nd, and 5th Guards Tank Armies, in May the 3rd Guards Tank Army, and in July 1943 the 4th Tank Army, were created with this composition.

Some very important measures were also introduced for the further improvement of the specialized new formations of the RGK. In April 1943, the creation of RGK corps was begun within the RGK artillery. (Up to the end of the year, 6 corps in all were created.) In the same year, 2 gun divisions, 28 mortar brigades, and also 50 tank-des-troyer brigades, were formed. The RGK artillery began to shift over to mechanized traction. In the armored troops, the formation continued of assault gun regiments with light and medium assault guns, and the creation was also begun of heavy assault gun regiments. In the RGK engineer troops, assault (shturmovoy) combat engineer brigades were formed, and also new pontoon-bridging brigades. By the summer of 1943, the aviation reserves of General Headquarters consisted of 23 air corps.

In the period of preparation for the campaign, part of the strategic reserves were shifted to the fronts, mainly to those operating on the southwestern axis. Specifically dispatched here were the 1st Tank and the 8th Guards Armies, 9 rifle divisions, 1 tank corps, and 8 air corps.

By the beginning of July the remainder of the strategic reserves were also concentrated mainly on the southwestern axis (8 combined-arms armies, 2 tank armies, and 1 airborne army). Most worthy of note is the fact that on the axis where the main enemy strike was expected, in the rear of the Central and Voronezh Fronts, the Steppe Front was deployed (the 4th and 5th Guards Armies, the 27th, 47th, and 53rd Combined-Arms Armies, the 5th Guards Tank Army, and the 5th Air Army), which was the most powerful formation of strategic reserves ever formed during the war. This

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front had the task of preparing defense lines and of being ready to deliver counterstrikes on the axis of both faces of the Kursk salient, and also for active operations on special orders of General Headquarters.

The summer-fall campaign of 1943, which began with the heated engagements before Kursk, ended in massive defeat for the German-Fascist troops and brought Fascist Germany to the brink of catastrophe. By the end of the campaign, our troops had liberated a huge part of the territory of the USSR and had come out on the approaches to Vitebsk, Orsha, and Bobruysk, and they had forced the Dnepr, seizing large bridgeheads on its right bank. In the attainment of this great success a large role was played by the bold, purposeful, and massed use of the General Headquarters reserves.

In accordance with the plan for the conduct of the summer-fall campaign of 1943, which provided for the concentration of the main efforts of Soviet troops on the southwestern axis, the overwhelming bulk of the strategic reserves was also used on this axis. Six combined-arms armies out of 8, 3 tank armies (the 3rd and 5th Guards and the 4th), and an air army were committed here. A number of armies drawn into the General Headquarters reserve during the campaign were also used on the southwestern axis (the 1st Guards, the 18th, 37th, and 61st). The 20th, 21st, and 6th Guards Armies were committed on the western axis.

The General Headquarters reserves in existence at the beginning of July 1943 were used partially in the defensive engagement, mainly in the zone of the Voronezh Front (the 5th Guards Tank Army and the 5th Guards Combined-Arms Army of the Steppe Front), but mostly for the counteroffensive (the main forces of the Steppe Front, the 4th Tank Army, the 11th Army, and others). As for the general offensive which followed immediately the counteroffensive before Kursk, the reserves used in it were those created during the campaign. It must be noted that the greater part of the tank armies suffered considerable losses during the defensive engagement

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and the counteroffensive, and for this reason they had to be taken into the General Headquarters reserve in July and August, a fact which was reflected in the speed and results of the offensive operations in the Ukraine east of the Dnepr (Levoberezhnaya Ukraina).

The summer-fall campaign of 1943 was very strenuous and required the commitment of major forces. Nevertheless, by the beginning of the winter campaign of 1944, General Headquarters had succeeded in creating sufficiently strong reserves: 6 combined-arms armies (17 rifle and cavalry divisions), 2 tank armies, and 9 separate tank and mechanized corps. In this campaign as in the preceding one, the main events developed in the southern sector of the Soviet-German front. For this reason, all the strategic reserves present at the beginning of the campaign were wholly used to reinforce the troops operating in the Ukraine. Committed here during the period from January to March 1944 were the 47th, 69th, and 70th Combined-Arms Armies, the 2nd and 4th Tank Armies, the 6th Airborne Army, and also a tank corps and some cavalry corps. It must be emphasized that during the campaign, General Headquarters created, mainly from its own reserves, a new front, the 2nd Belorussian, and deployed it on the Kovel-Lublin axis.¹

Having successfully completed the winter campaign of 1944, Soviet troops already by the middle of April had begun active preparations for summer operations. These preparations were conducted very strenuously, on a grand scale, and with the observance of very strict concealment measures.

In preparing for summer operations, the Soviet Supreme High Command decided to shift its efforts to the western axis, so that with the forces of the 1st Baltic, the 1st, 2nd, and

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1. The 2nd Belorussian Front was formed on 17 February 1944... a few words missing... included the 47th, 61st, and 70th Combined-Arms... a few words missing.

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3rd Belorussian and the 1st Ukrainian Fronts, it could destroy two powerful strategic groupings of enemy troops (army groups "Center" and "Northern Ukraine"), liberate important areas of our country and the eastern part of our ally, Poland, and create favorable conditions to deliver the final strike on the Berlin axis.

It is easy to understand that this required major inter-frontal regroupings of troops, which began at the end of March and continued to the middle of June 1944. During this period, 76 rifle and cavalry divisions, 13 tank and mechanized corps, 11 air corps, about 25 artillery divisions, 53 artillery brigades, and many other units and large units were regrouped. All these regroupings were undertaken with the goal of reinforcing the fronts which were operating on the main axis, and also the Leningrad and Karelian Fronts. In line with this, the troops were not simply shifted from one front to another, but as a rule were withdrawn from fronts in the field into the General Headquarters reserve, and only after replacement and building up to required strength were they shifted to other fronts. On the western axis the new 2nd Belorussian Front was created.¹

At the same time, General Headquarters retained considerable forces under its own command. By the middle of June the General Headquarters reserve contained the command of the 4th Ukrainian Front, the 2nd Guards Army, the 51st Combined-Arms Army, the 5th Guards Tank Army, 6 separate tank corps, 7 mechanized corps, and 1 cavalry corps, grouped mainly on the western axis.

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1. Created in February 1944, the 2nd Belorussian Front was disbanded on 5 April 1944. On 19 April, on the base of the command of the 10th Army, a new command was formed for the 2nd Belorussian Front. Included in it were the 33rd, 49th, and 50th Combined-Arms Armies and the 4th Air Army.

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As for the preparation of specialized new formations of the RGK, one may note the creation of guards heavy tank brigades and breakthrough regiments, and also heavy assault gun brigades and regiments. Also formed, in addition, were 5 artillery breakthrough divisions, 4 artillery corps, 14 heavy mortar brigades, and 7 brigades and 2 regiments of rocket artillery. In the RGK aviation, an assault air corps and 5 divisions were formed.

The summer-fall campaign of 1944 was one of the major ones, both in its results and in the scope of the use of strategic reserves. During the campaign, General Headquarters committed not only all the forces then in its reserve (the 2nd Guards, the 51st Combined-Arms, and the 5th Guards Tank Armies) but also 14 combined-arms armies attached to the reserve during the campaign itself. By far the greater part of these forces were used on the main (western) axis, while 2 armies were used on the northwestern axis and 1 on the southwestern.

It should be noted in connection with this that almost half the forces (7 armies) were committed in November and December 1944, i.e., as preparation for the new, and final, 1945 campaign in Europe. Of these, 6 armies (the 6th, 21st, 33rd, 52nd, 59th, and 61st) were on the western axis, where our troops were to deliver the main strike, and 1 army (the 4th Guards) was on the Budapest axis. By committing such considerable forces, Supreme High Command General Headquarters ensured the creation by the beginning of 1945 of powerful strike groupings on all the most important axes of the Soviet-German front, especially on the Warsaw-Berlin axis. By the beginning of January 1945, the 9th Guards and the 19th and 26th Combined-Arms Armies remained under direct command of General Headquarters.

Although, during the 1945 campaign in Europe, strategic reserves were committed on a relatively small scale, their use was purposeful and effective. Thus, the commitment to battle of the 19th Army in East Pomerania, of the 26th and


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9th Guards Armies in the area of Budapest, and of the 28th Army¹ before Berlin exerted a very real influence on the development of operations. Together with this it must be noted that the reserves remaining under the command of General Headquarters at the beginning of the campaign were limited, and this was one of the reasons for the delay in the destruction of the enemy's East Pomeranian grouping, and this in turn caused a delay in carrying out the operation aimed at the decisive destruction of the enemy in the area of Berlin. 50X1-HUM

As a result of the 1945 campaign in Europe the Soviet Armed Forces completed the defeat of the German-Fascist Army. Fascist Germany surrendered unconditionally. But the Second World War had still not come to an end. Imperialist Japan continued its opposition. The Soviet Union, striving to end the world war as quickly as possible, to help liberate the peoples of Southeast Asia from Japanese imperialist oppression, and to guarantee the security of its own Far East borders decided, in fulfilment of the obligations to its allies, to enter the war against imperialist Japan.

Already during the final campaign in Europe, Supreme High Command General Headquarters had begun to create strategic reserves for transfer to the Far East. In April, the 5th Army was attached to the reserve, on 1 May the 39th Army, and after the end of the war in Europe, the 53rd Combined-Arms Army, the 6th Guards Tank Army, and a number of artillery, engineer, and other units and large units. The transfer of these troops to the Far East was begun. One of the largest strategic regroupings during the Second World War was accomplished in a short period of time. Transferred from west to east were 2 front commands, 3 combined-arms armies, and 1 tank army - in all 39 divisions,

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1. The 28th Army was attached to the General Headquarters reserve after the liquidation of the enemy grouping southwest of Koenigsberg.

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a tank and 2 mechanized corps, and also a large number of artillery, engineer, and other units.

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Once the strategic reserves arrived in the Far East, they were used to reinforce troops already there. These reserves, consisting of formations and large units which had travelled a glorious combat route and amassed great combat experience, were the main nucleus of the grouping of Soviet troops whose crushing blow ensured the quick defeat of the Kwantung Army and compelled imperialist Japan to surrender unconditionally.

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Even a brief survey permits one to form a definite idea of the colossal scope of the preparation and the scale of the use of strategic reserves during the Second World War, and also of the significance of these reserves for conducting defensive and offensive operations by the Soviet Armed Forces. The experience of the preparation and use of strategic reserves in the past war, in certain of its elements, has not lost significance even at the present time.

First of all, it has demonstrated with complete clarity the paramount, fundamental significance of the thesis of our military science that without reserves the conduct of modern warfare is impossible. For this reason, problems of the creation of reserves, and most of all of strategic reserves, must be the subject of deep study and definite practical measures even in peacetime. This is not just a matter of having a specific part of the armed forces and specially formed units under the direct orders of the Supreme High Command, but also the preparation of human resources, command personnel, and stockpiles of arms and combat equipment for newly formed units and for the restoration of large units and units of troops in the field who have lost their combat effectiveness.

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There is no doubt that in the future not only the number but even the composition of strategic reserves will be completely different from what they were in the last war. However, certain general principles of their creation and use have retained their significance even at the present time. In our view, the difference between the two types of strategic reserves has maintained its significance: the first is that part of the armed forces (missile and ground troops, aviation and navy) under the direct orders of the Supreme High Command; and the second are those newly formed units of missile, engineer, and chemical troops, communications troops and others, which are not organically a part of formations and large units, but are intended for their reinforcement. Although such a distinction may appear arbitrary, still it is necessary, because the preparation and use of each kind of reserve has its own particular and very real features which must be taken into account.

During the Second World War, the strategic reserves were created out of newly formed units or by withdrawal of troops from the army in the field, with their subsequent reinforcement and building up to strength at the expense of the means of Supreme High Command General Headquarters. This will be done even in modern warfare. In either case, as was emphasized earlier, appropriate reserves are required of command personnel, of enlisted men and NCOs trained as specialists, and of stockpiles of arms and combat equipment. For the formation of missile, engineer, chemical, and other units and large units, however, it is necessary to have appropriate centers which are capable of performing such a task quickly and competently.

The strategic reserves in the last war were used to perform various tasks: to relieve large units and formations that had lost their combat effectiveness; to set up the defense in the depth of the disposition of one's own troops; to reinforce the fronts in the field, on defense and offense; to create strike groupings with the aim of delivering strong counterstrikes against the enemy or of going over to the counteroffensive; to create strike groupings on newly opened

axes of a given strategic front; and to reinforce troops on a new strategic front. Strategic reserves may also be used for such purposes in the future, and the demand on them to relieve troops who have lost their combat effectiveness may increase considerably.

As shown by the experience of war, the purposeful and massed use of strategic reserves, i.e., their commitment as major formations on the main axes, has great significance. This made it possible to have a decisive influence on the development of events, ensuring the successful conduct of both defensive and offensive operations. But, on the other hand, in those cases where strategic reserves were scattered and distributed relatively evenly on many axes, success was usually not attained. Naturally, under modern conditions there cannot be such compact disposition and movement of strategic reserves as there was in the Second World War. However, the principle of their use on the main axes to perform the main tasks retains its significance even today.

The creation of strategic reserves, as shown by the experience of the past, is one of the most important components of strategic planning for armed combat. Any plan will be realistic if it makes provision not only for the appropriate reinforcement of the fronts to perform the tasks ahead, but also for the allotment to the direct control of the Supreme High Command of sufficiently large reserves which could be used to build up the forces of the first strategic echelon. In their approach to the performance of this task, the Soviet Supreme High Command and the German command differed fundamentally. The Soviet command, as is obvious from the foregoing account, in preparing for campaigns, not only reinforced the fronts, but also kept major forces under its own control. In some cases this consisted of powerful formations of strategic reserves in the form of a front (the Steppe Front, before Kursk in 1943). At the same time, the German-Fascist command, as a rule, incorporated almost all its forces in the army groups, retaining under its own control a very limited number of large units which did not have adequate combat effectiveness. For this

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reason, during the development of operations it was compelled to resort to the rapid transfer of forces, mainly from the west, and to their partial regrouping within the limits of the Soviet-German front. The commitment of these forces was often delayed and took place by units, and this did not produce the necessary result.

In an article in a journal it is not possible to elucidate completely all the problems of such an important and vast problem as the creation and use of strategic reserves in the last war. One can only hope that this article will be of help in the further working out of this problem.

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